

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 CU-02 SY-04 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01

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R 131030Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1684

INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 4983

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, SN

SUBJECT: SINGAPORE STUDENTS PROTEST AGAINST EXPULSION OF
FOREIGN STUDENT ACTIVISTS

REFS: (A) SINGAPORE 4950; (B) SINGAPORE 4546

1. SUMMARY. RISING STUDENT PROTEST AGAINST THE EXPULSION
OF SIX FOREIGN STUDENTS FROM SINGAPORE HAS CULMINATED IN
THE PRESENTATION OF TEN DEMANDS UPON THE UNIVERSITY ADMINIS-
TRATION BY THE UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE STUDENT UNION. ALTHOUGH
THE DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR ASSURED A RALLY OF 2,000 STUDENTS
THAT POLICE AND MILITARY PERSONNEL INVOLVED IN AN ANNUAL
INTERNAL SECURITY EXERCISE WOULD NOT ENTER THE CAMPUS. HE SAID
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HE COULD NOT RESPOND TO THE DEMAND TO REINSTATE THE SIX DEPOR-

TED STUDENTS AND PROMISED TO ANSWER THE OTHER DEMANDS OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS. MEANWHILE, THE TRIAL OF STUDENT LEADER TAN WAH PIOW ENTERED ITS THIRD DAY BEFORE A PACKED COURTROOM OF TAN SYMPATHIZERS. IN A RELATED DEVELOPMENT, AN AUSTRALIAN STUDENT LEADER LEFT SINGAPORE AFTER BEING FRUSTRATED IN HIS EFFORTS TO ATTEND THE TRIAL AND CONTACT LOCAL STUDENTS. THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTION IN DEPORTING THE FOREIGN STUDENTS MAY WELL HAVE BEEN TIMED TO THWART GROWING STUDENT ACTIVISM BY REMOVING SEVERAL KEY LEADERS FROM THE SCENE. IN FACT, THE EXPULSION HAS BECOME A RALLYING POINT FOR SINGAPORE STUDENTS. THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN BY SURPRISE AND IT IS UNCLEAR AT THIS POINT HOW IT PLANS TO RESPOND. END SUMMARY.

2. THE DEPORTATION OF ONE HONG KONG AND FIVE MALAYSIAN CHINESE STUDENTS FROM SINGAPORE HAS PRECIPITATED PROTEST DEMONSTRATIONS ON THE CAMPUSES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE AND SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC WHICH HAVE ATTRACTED A GROWING NUMBER OF SYMPATHIZERS. ACCORDING TO STRAITS TIMES AND NEW NATION REPORTS, ON DECEMBER 11 MORE THAN 300 UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE STUDENTS AND 150 ENGINEERING STUDENTS AT THE POLYTECHNIC CAMPUSES BOYCOTTED CLASSES TO ATTEND RALLIES. THE FOLLOWING MORNING "HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS." LARGELY FROM THE FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE TO WHICH MOST OF EXPELLED STUDENTS BELONGED, REPORTEDLY SKIPPED CLASSES TO ATTEND RALLIES. THE FOLLOWING MORNING "HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS." LARGELY FROM THE FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE TO WHICH MOST OF EXPELLED STUDENTS BELONGED, REPORTEDLY SKIPPED CLASSES TO ATTEND RALLIES AT THE BUKIT TIMAH CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE. TWO RALLIES INVOLVING 150 AND 300 STUDENTS RESPECTIVELY WERE HELD ON THE DIFFERENT CAMPUSES AT SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC.

3. ON DECEMBER 12, A 30-MEMBER DELEGATION FROM THE UNIVERSITY

OF SINGAPORE STUDENT UNION (USSU) PRESENTED A PETITION TO THE DEPUTY VICE CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY, REGINALD QUAHE, PRESENTING TEN DEMANDS TO THE UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION. THESE INCLUDED (A) A REQUEST THAT THE UNIVERSITY NOT ALLOW POLICE AND MILITARY TO ENTER UNIVERSITY GROUNDS IN CONNECTION WITH A THREE-DAY ANNUAL INTERNAL SECURITY EXERCISE SCHEDULED

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TO BEGIN DECEMBER 13; (B) THE REINSTATMENT OF THE SIX FOREIGN STUDENTS WHOSE STUDENT PASSES WERE CANCELLED BY THE GOVERNMENT AND WHO WERE DEPORTED FROM SINGAPORE; AND (C) THE ABOLITION OF RULES SET OUT IN A BOOKLET OF GUIDELINES FOR STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS WHICH ALLEGEDLY "RESTRICTED OR CURBED STUDENT ACTIVITIES ON CAMPUSES" AND (D) AN ASSURANCE THAT ACTION WOULD NOT BE TAKEN AGAINST STUDENTS WHO DID NOT ATTEND LECTURES IN ORDER TO ATTEND RALLIES.

4. THE DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR APPEARED BEFORE AN EVENING RALLY OF 2,000 STUDENTS ON DECEMBER 12 AND ASSURED THEM THAT POLICE AND MILITARY PERSONNEL WOULD NOT ENTER THE BUKIT TIMAH CAMPUS DURING THE SECURITY EXERCISE. HE NOTED THAT THE SIX STUDENTS HAD NOT BEEN EXPELLED BY THE UNIVERSITY AND, THEREFORE, COULD NOT RESPOND TO THIS REQUEST. HE SAID HE COULD NOT ANSWER THE REMAINING DEMANDS BUT PROMISED A POINT-BY-POINT ANSWER OVER THE NEXT EIGHT DAYS. DURING THE MEETING, HE WAS REPEATEDLY INTERRUPTED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE USSU TAN WAH PIOW WHO INSISTED THAT HE GIVE A STRAIGHT "YES" OR "NO" ANSWER TO THE DEMANDS.

5. MEANWHILE, THE TRIAL OF SINGAPORE STUDENT LEADER TAN WAH PIOW AND TWO CO-DEFENDENTS (INDUSTRIAL WORKERS) ON RIOTING CHARGES (REF B) ENTERED ITS THIRD DAY. AT THE OUTSET TAN DIMISSED HIS LAWYER AND SINCE THEN HAS BEEN CONDUCTING A SPIRITED DEFENSE. THE DISTRICT COURT JUDGE HAS GIVEN HIM CONSIDERABLE LATITUDE, BUT FINALLY RULED OUT HIS PERSISTENT ATTEMPTS TO CROSS-EXAMINE NTUC PRESIDENT PHEY YEW KOK CONCERNING HIS QUALIFICATIONS TO REPRESENT THE WORKERS AND ON LABOR AND AND INDUSTRIAL PROBLEMS LEADING TO THE LAY-OFF AT THE AMERICAN MARINE SHIPYARD. HE ALSO REFUSED TAN'S MOTION TO DELAY THE TRIAL SO THAT HE COULD ATTEND A STUDENT PROTEST MEETING. HOWEVER, HE DID GRANT TAN'S APPLICATION TO SUBPOENA THREE OF THE EXPELLED STUDENTS AS MATERIAL WITNESSES. THE COURTROOM HAS BEEN PACKED WITH TAN SUPPORTERS.

6. IN A PARTIALLY RELATED DEVELOPMENT, IMMIGRATION OFFICIALS SEIZED THE PASSPORT OF IAN MACDONALD, PRESIDENT-ELECT OF THE AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS UNION WHO ARRIVED IN SINGAPORE TO ATTEND TAN'S TRIAL. ALTHOUGH HE WAS NOT PERMITTED TO ATTEND THE TRIAL OR TO SPEAK TO SINGAPORE STUDENTS, HE SOMEHOW MANAGED TO CONVEY A MESSAGE THROUGH THE USSU WHICH WAS READ OUT
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AT THE MASS RALLY ON DECEMBER 12 PLEDGING THE SUPPORT OF AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS FOR THEIR SINGAPORE COUNTERPARTS. HE LEFT FOR BANGKOK DECEMBER 12.

7. THE STRAITS TIMES REPORTED THE EXPULSION OF SIX FOREIGN STUDENTS IN BANNER HEADLINES AND THE NEW NATION GAVE INITIAL HEAVY COVERAGE TO THE CAMPUS REACTION. SUBSEQUENTLY, THE STRAITS TIMES GAVE FRONTPAGE COVERAGE TO THE DEPORTATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN STUDENT LEADER, BUT REPORTED THE DEMONSTRATIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY AND THE TRIAL OF TAN WAH PIOW ON PAGES 11 AND 17. THE CHINESE PRESS COVERAGE OF THE STUDENT EXPULSIONS AND THE TAN WAH PIOW TRIAL HAS BEEN COMPLETE BUT HANDLED IN LOW KEY.

8. INFORMATION NOTE: TOTAL STUDENT ENROLLEMENT AT THE UNI-

UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE IS APPROXIMATELY 5,300. 20 PERCENT OF THE STUDENTS LIVE IN COLLEGES FOR HOSTELS ON OR NEAR CAMPUS. THE TOTAL ENROLLMENT AT SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC IS APPROXIMATELY 7,000 (4,000 FULL-TIME AND 3,000 PART-TIME). ENROLLMENT AT NANYANG UNIVERSITY IS 2,500. THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE OVERT REACTION TO DATE AT NANYANG UNIVERSITY, POSSIBLY BECAUSE OF ITS ISOLATED LOCATION IN THE WESTERN PART OF THE ISLAND.

9. COMMENT. THE DEPORTATION OF THE SIX FOREIGN STUDENTS JUST HOURS PRIOR TO THE BEGINNING OF TAN'S TRIAL MAY WELL HAVE BEEN DESIGNED TO THWART GROWING STUDENT ACTIVISM BY REMOVING SEVERAL KEY LEADERS FROM THE SCENE. THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTION SEEMS TO HAVE BACKFIRED AND EXPULSION MAY HAVE CREATED A NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS ACTIVISTS TO REPLACE THOSE WHO WERE DEPORTED. UP TO NOW, MOST OF SINGAPORE'S STUDENTS HAVE SHUNNED DEMONSTRATIONS AND ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES. WHILE THE MAJORITY ON CAMPUS CONTINUE TO BE APOITICAL, AN INCREASING NUMBER ARE ATTENDING THE RALLIES AND SHOWING UNUSUAL SPUNK IN CONFRONTING THE AUTHORITIES. THEIR ACTIVISM HAS ALMOST CERTAINLY BEEN INFLUENCED BY THE CONTINUING STUDENT/GOVERNMENT CONFRONTATION IN KUALA LUMPUR AND DEMONSTRATIONS IN RANGOON, WHICH HAVE

RECEIVED EXTENSIVE PRESS COVERAGE HERE. WHILE THE GOS HAS CRACKED DOWN HARD AGAINST FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT, IT HAS SO FAR BEEN RELATIVELY RESTRAINED IN DEALING WITH THE CONFIDENTIAL

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LATEST MANIFESTATIONS OF INDIGENOUS STUDENT DISSENT. STRONG STUDENT REACTION TO THE EXCLUSION APPEARS TO HAVE TAKEN THE GOVERNMENT BY SURPRISE. ONLY A WEEK AGO AUTHORITIES IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS WERE SUPREEMELY CONFIDENT THAT STUDENT ACTIVISM WOULD NOT BECOME A SERIOUS PROBLEM IN SINGAPORE. THE EVENTS OF THE LAST THREE DAYS HAVE ALMOST CERTAINLY SHAKEN THEIR CONFIDENCE. AT THIS POINT IT REMAINS UNCLEAR WHAT STRATEGY THE GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO ADOPT TO DEAL WITH MOUNTING STUDENT DEFIANCE. GRANT

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: EXPULSION, STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS, STUDENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 13 DEC 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: powellba2
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974SINGAP04983
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740363-0701
From: SINGAPORE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19741236/aaaabetk.tel
Line Count: 211
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 74 SINGAPORE 4950, 74 SINGAPORE 4546
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: powellba2
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23 JUN 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <09 JUL 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <27 MAR 2003 by CunninFX>; WITHDRAWN <13 Jun 2005 by BoyleJA, PRIVACY>; RELEASED <23 JUN 2005 by blochd0>; APPROVED <23 JUN 2005 by powellba2>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SINGAPORE STUDENTS PROTEST AGAINST EXPULSION OF FOREIGN STUDENT ACTIVISTS
TAGS: PINS, SN
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005